

Commissioner Beale

Deputy Commissioner Norman

Chief of Operations Everett

9/14/2018

I am writing to request an investigation into the retaliation and harassment I have been suffering on a consistent basis from Captain Michael St. John. I have complained in writing and verbally to the fire administration on several occasions and nothing seems to stop the constant harassment by Captain St. John. I personally feel this harassment is due to my refusal to act illegally and unethically in his favor and in favor of others. As you know, I am a 15-year veteran firefighter dedicated to my job and the community which I love. However, my world as a firefighter has been changed drastically since 2016 when I resigned from the position of Deputy Fire Commissioner. Yes, I was asked to do some illegal and unethical things which I refused to do.

As you are aware, in 2015 Henry George Thomas, was charged with several felony counts involving illegal firearms and as a result, he chose to resign from the fire department on January 8, 2016 to avoid termination. I was appointed three days later on January 11, 2016. After Henry George Thomas cut his plea deal, I was asked as Fire Commissioner to rehire him back to the department. I said at that time that I could not, nor would I do so because it is illegal to hire firefighters who have been indicted with felonies such as gun charges. Nepotism is not a crime, but this act unquestionably violates the City's Charter. Not only is it illegal, but I also made it clear on a personal note that my brother died at the hands of illegal guns on the street and this was the worst kind of charge someone could have in a city that has way too many illegal guns in the hands of our young people. At that time, I point blank said I would not rehire him. In my honest opinion I strongly feel me not rehiring Henry George complicated the mayor's relationship with me. Unfortunately for me, this caused serious animosity and issues between the mayor's family and I. Especially the mayor's father who made it very clear he was going to get me out of there and put someone in that would rehire Henry George Thomas. I had no problem with that because I wasn't going to change my mind and I was very comfortable in turnout gear.

After all that I've done for the mayor, the late nights, the fighting, putting his needs and campaign first, the very person that was there during the primary standing side by side with him in the trenches when we had nothing is now being treated as disloyal for refusing to participate in something that is clearly wrong, illegal and unethical, even though I understood who's brother it was, it still didn't make it right.

Because of this, I began getting retaliated against by then a Fire Captain. Each day, he would call me a "piece of shit" for not rehiring Henry George, and "white boy lover". He told many firefighters who are witnesses to this he was openly angry at me for not hiring Henry George Thomas back, but I was pushing to hire a white firefighter back. The situation and harassment at work got so bad that I resigned as Fire Commissioner in August 2016 down to the rank of firefighter, but the harassment and retaliation did not stop there....

In July 2016 I was ordered to promote a black captain to the rank of Deputy Chief. I was asked to make that promotion over a white captain. I was told all though the white captain tested better on his exam

and the white captain was clearly a much more qualified officer than the black captain, that I should not promote the white captain over the black captain. As you know, I refused that order to make that promotion based on race and skin color- which we all know is wrong. No man should ever be judged by the color of his skin, and no man should ever be promoted or demoted because of the color of his skin. I made it my business as commissioner to treat all firefighters and officers under my command fair and just regardless of the color of one's skin. I chose to go down the line for all promotions as fire Commissioner. I promoted the #1 and #2 firefighters to the rank of Lieutenant. No one had a problem because they both were black. I was told to reclassify the Fire Dispatch Superintendent position to promote a black fire lieutenant to the rank of captain who also sat at the top of the promotional list but as soon as it was time to promote the #1 captain to the rank of Deputy Chief, there were problems for me. I refused to promote the black captain first so in return I was treated as if I was wrong for my action and again labelled a reverse racist. All I wanted to do was create a system where no firefighter or officer ever had to worry about being skipped by anyone under them. When firefighters and officers are skipped no matter the color of their skin it creates separation, animosity and anger amongst the ranks, especially if race is involved. There are race issues on this job but only created by moves like the one I tried to prevent. Again, something that I wanted to eliminate from this job to boost morale. As a result, I have suffered more retaliation.

Every tour I worked, Captain Mike St. John made it his business to come down to station #2 to harass me. It almost felt like he was being sent by some higher ups outside of the fire department. I feel this way because I followed every rule in reporting the harassment and Captain St. John kept on coming. Captain St. John made it his business to come to the firehouse on my first day back to let me know he was "my fucking boss now and I would be seeing him on a regular basis." Almost every tour I worked Captain St. John would come to the firehouse just to tell me to tuck in my shirt, go pump my gas, your ass in mine now, get involved in everyday operations pertaining to our work schedule just to create a hostile work environment for me. He called me "fake brother", "white boy lover", and said things like "you put that white motherfucker back on but you wouldn't put HG (Henry George) back." So, I did fire back to let him know I wasn't hiring anybody that sold guns in this city, bottom line. These comments he made to me are illegal, discriminatory, harassing, and MUST stop. Every day I come to work, it makes me sick to my stomach to have to endure this harassment for doing the right thing. I cannot let this go on any longer because it's jeopardizing my health, my safety and my family's wellbeing. When I came back to the fire line all I wanted was to be left alone and allowed to do the job but I was put on the back of the rescue company, a position mainly for new firefighters and told I needed to be trained again even though I was off the fire line for 8 months. In some cases firefighters are off the line for over a year and not treated like that. I was also moved out of my original group because the deputy chief felt he couldn't discipline me the way he wanted to. I was trained to fight fires, not be judged by my peers as an appointed fire commissioner. I was hired to run interference for the mayor, not his family. I was willing to protect the mayor but not sell my soul. I made a choice in April 2016 to walk out of that job as commissioner on my own two feet and not crawl out of there on my hands and knees begging for mercy. I just wanted to be left alone and no one seems to want that to happen.

With all that being said, I am requesting a formal investigation into these issues that I want exposed and dealt with properly. Again, I've made several complaints both written and verbal to my superiors and it seems to fall upon deaf ears. This retaliation and harassment must end by Captain St. John, and who ever else is giving him the green light to do so. Captain St. John was even caught and chased away by

the Chief of Operations once because I called the chief to let him know he was at station #2 harassing me during one of my works tours. Additionally, as recent as September 12, 2018, I was informed by another firefighter that Captain St. John was looking for me at my firehouse while I was on vacation. I am available, at any time to discuss this matter in detail. I can be reached on my cell at **917-490-8023**

Sincerely

Ernest Richardson,

#248